(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) No, Sir;

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Missing Indian travellers gone to Pak

†2469. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is no trace of about forty six Indian travellers that boarded in the Caravan-e-aman bus which had gone to Pak occupied Kashmir from Srinagar;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of efforts made by Government to trace them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) According to the latest information, 10 out of the 54 Indian nationals who had travelled abroad the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus (Caravan-e-aman) to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir are still stranded in PoK. Government is in touch with Pakistani authorities to facilitate their return.

Vacancies in passport offices

2470. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are number of vacancies in different Regional Passport Offices in the country;

(b) if so, the number of such vacancies reported from various RPOs;

(c) whether it is a fact that the work in many RPOs are being offloaded to private parties;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor;

(e) the steps taken to fill the existing vacancies at the RPOs; and

(f) the details thereof?

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) At present there are 283 vacancies in various Grades in RPOs.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) and (f) The Government has been continually taking steps to fill up the existing vacancies at the RPOs. The Staff Selection Commission has recently made available dossiers of 57 Lower Division Clerks (LDCs), which are being processed to fill up the vacancies.

Shortage of staff in passport offices

2471. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is steep increase in the number of passports issued by various Regional Passport Offices in the country;

(b) if so, the number of passports being issued every year from the year 2000 to 2004;

(c) whether it is also a fact that the staff strength at the RPOs are not increased in tune with the increasing work load; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by Government to overcome the shortage of staff?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Number of passports issued year-wise is as under:—

Year	Number of passports issued
2000	22,43,033
2001	27,80,738
2002	26,66,555
2003	29,55,529
2004	33,52,780

(c) Yes, Sir.